

## Elements in Vocations and Vocational Discernment

1. We often don't know what God is asking of us because we are not yet willing to do what He desires of us. Once we have resigned to do whatever God asks, even before we know it, is when He makes things clear – a vocation requires great generosity.
2. God gives the call, not me or anyone else, though He uses mediators to communicate the call. "You have not chosen Me; I have chosen you."
3. Vocation is borne and realized in the context of prayer, an intimate dialogue between God and the person.
4. We are told to pray for vocations, that God might send laborers for the vineyard. We can also pray for a vocation – that God might call me to be a priest or consecrated.
5. A first prerequisite in discerning a vocation is to see if the natural qualities required by the given state of life are present.
6. A call to priesthood, and even to consecrated life, requires a degree of normalcy.
7. Fear is the normal human response to anything supernatural and thus it is often present when God begins to make known His call
8. Unlike God calling me to do a particular act at a particular time, a vocation is to a state of life which has permanence. Thus, the graces that God sends me to lead me to a particular state of life are repetitive and, over time, consistently and persistently pull in a certain direction.
9. God calls from the womb, not proximately but remotely. He already knows His designs upon us, our response, and the end result. He "orders all things mightily and lovingly" for our good. Thus, we who have been called, can "look in the rear view mirror" and see how God has been drawing us for such a long time.
10. A person normally does not get the "proximate" call of a priestly or religious vocation until he or she is taking his or her baptismal call to holiness seriously.
11. One who is being called by God may initially "run the opposite direction" from what God is asking, but he or she will notice that it is very difficult, if at all possible, to "shake" the thoughts and pre-occupation of the mind with the "idea" of a vocation.
12. Thinking about the idea of being a priest or religious brother or sister gradually moves to wanting to be one. Thus, if we are generous and sincere, we can eventually simply know God's will by asking ourselves honestly, "What is my deepest desire?"
13. Discerning where God is calling me begins in prayer but the reality of the vocation is normally confirmed when I encounter the mystery of what I desire in another person (like a priest, religious brother, nun, consecrated virgin, religious community, etc.). A desire deep within me that God has planted recognizes the reality in another and thus gives me some direction to where God is calling me.
14. A call to consecrated life and/or priesthood is an invitation and not a command. Thus discernment must be made in freedom. Even if I realize that I am being called, I am not obliged to say "yes." Saying "yes" is the more virtuous response,

- but I don't sin if I decline to accept an invitation to the priesthood or consecrated life. Once I say "yes" then I bind myself to be faithful for the rest of my life, just like I would do if I committed to be married.
15. Marriage is a natural vocation, stamped into every human nature by God (see Genesis 1 and 2). The normal natural desire to be married, to know the love of a spouse, and to raise children, is stamped in one's nature. Thus marriage, though elevated by grace as a sacrament, does not require the same kind of supernatural discernment necessary in discerning a supernatural vocation.
  16. In a vocation to consecrated life or priesthood, God supernaturally gives a desire to the person which is supernatural, over and beyond what we normally desire as humans. This does not obliterate our natural desires, but if we are prayerful and striving to do God's will, we will be able to recognize that the deepest, most profound and consistent desires in me are pointing toward consecrated life or priesthood. Grace doesn't destroy nature; it perfects it.
  17. There is a double-call in a vocation to priesthood and consecrated life. There is the personal call of God moving my heart to respond to His will for me. This is discerned in prayer along with the help of a good spiritual director. Then there is the ecclesial call, which comes from the Church. No young man (no matter how much he believes he is called) is called to be a priest until the Church gives the call. This is true as well with religious institutes. Since there is a double-call, there is also a double-discernment: I discern and the Church discerns. Thus, I have the assurance and peace knowing that all does not rest on me. I not only discern, but I am being discerned.
  18. For one who is being called and is open to the call, God always gives the grace to do what He asks. Thus, the one called finds "wind beneath his wings". If I find myself always having to "white knuckle it" in the seminary or in formation, then this is a good sign that I am not being called – i.e. the grace of a vocation is not there. While the Cross is always present for those who wish to serve God in this life, acceptance of one's divine vocation should bring deep interior peace, even in the face of difficulties and human weakness.
  19. I should become a better man or a better woman by following God's call to priesthood or consecrated life. I should become a greater lover by saying "yes" to Him – not less. I should become happier by saying "yes" to an authentic vocation.
  20. Saying "yes" to one call means saying "no" to a host of others.
  21. Joy is a true sign of an authentic vocation.

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